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DOWN·LYRIC·LANES·

By

·ETHEL·COTTON·



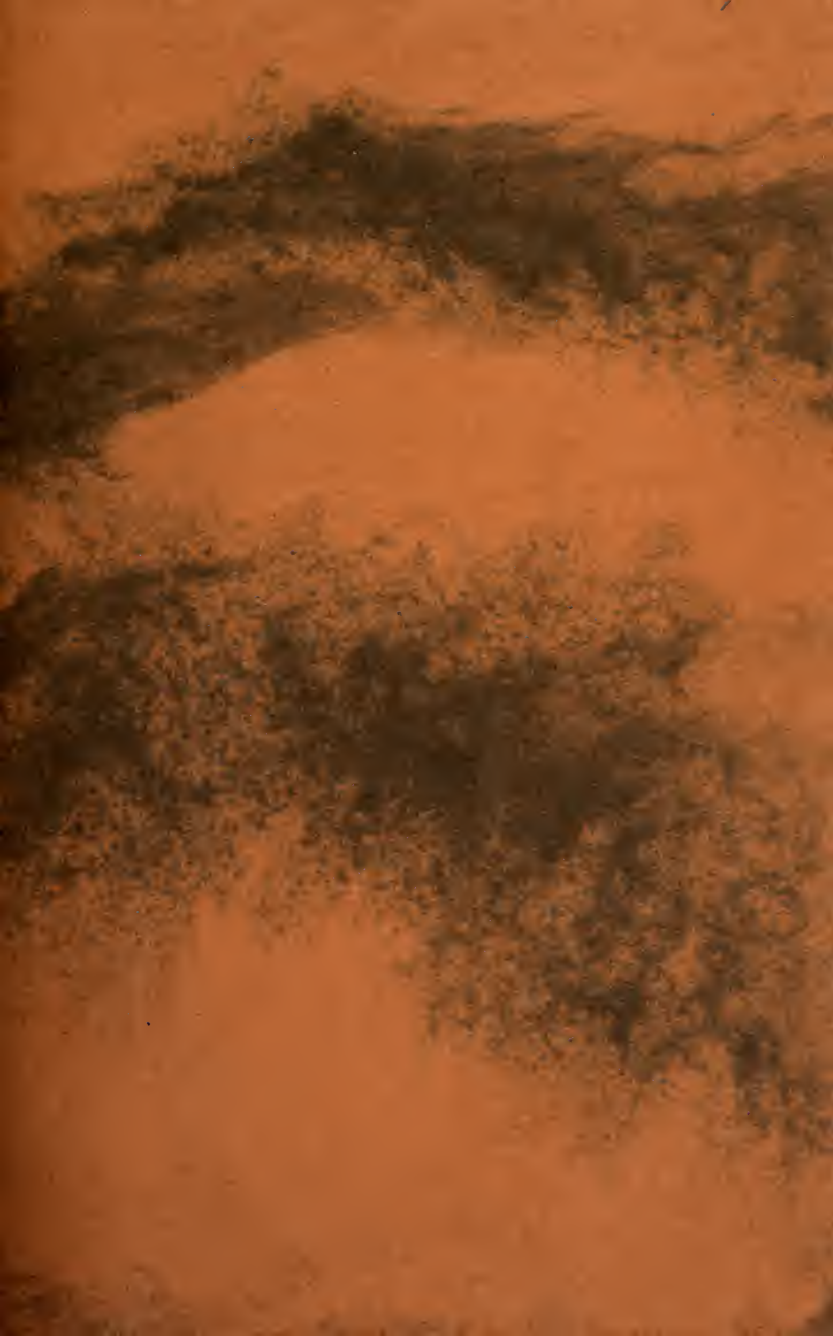
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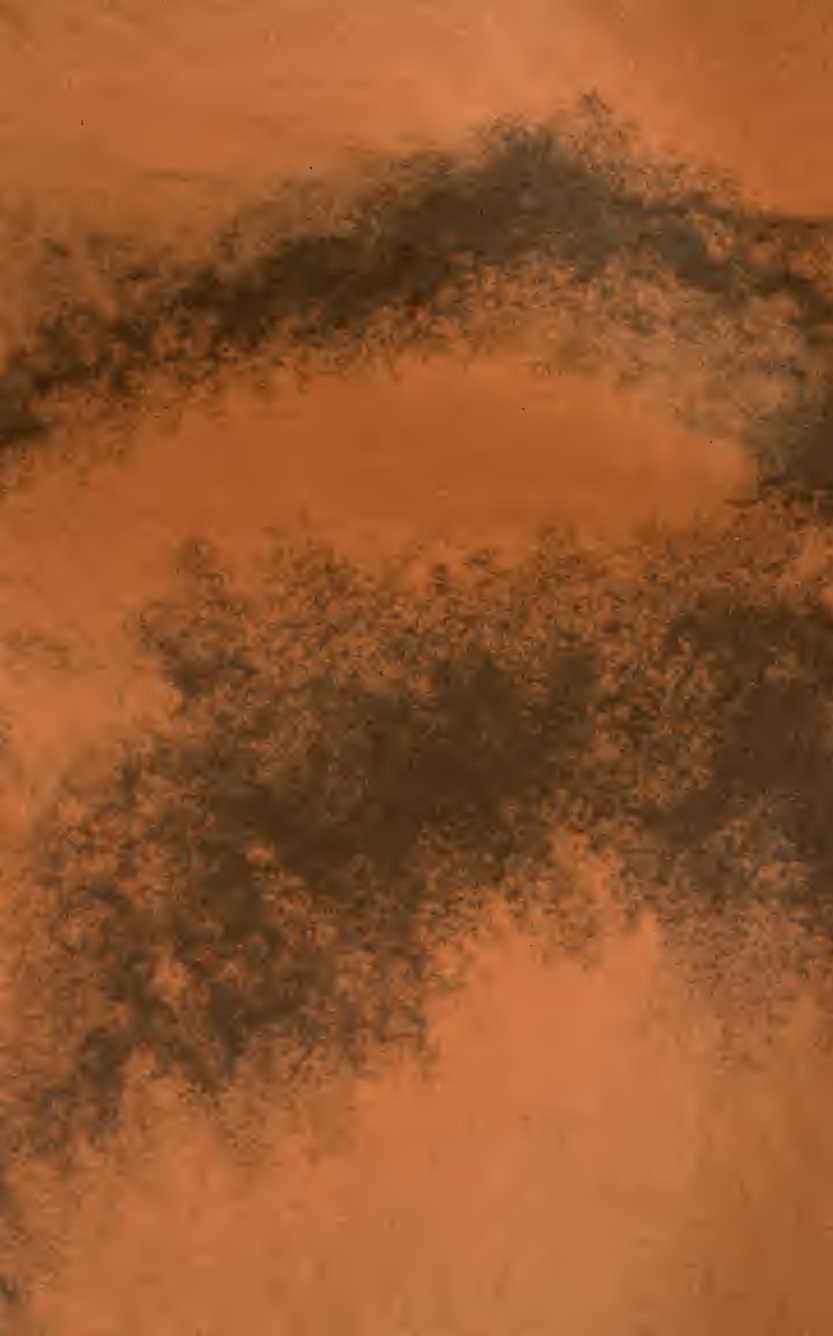
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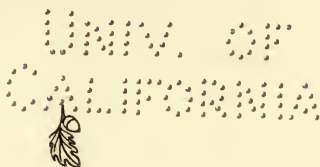






DOWN LYRIC LANES

By ETHEL COTTON



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SAN FRANCISCO

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Gift of Class of 1887

DEDICATION

*To you who by opening your
heart have allowed me to creep
into your understanding, this
little volume is lovingly
dedicated.*

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SUN AND SHADE



I GREET THEE, SPRING

Hail to thee, Springtime of Gladness!
Wonderful year-time of promise!
Each little bud in its outline
Sketching the coming of summer,
Soon to burst forth in its beauty,
Full and complete in its glory!
All of thy delicate colors,
Wistful and dainty as fog-wreaths,
Hover around and about us.
Tenderly brooding above us,
Filtering into our senses,
Stir the deep wells of our beings;
Lift vague and shadowy fancies,
Limn them, alluring, before us.
Hope is in every tendril,
Tiptoeing up to the star-light,
Climbing more close to the star-light;
Power in every blade-throb,
Feeling the pull of the planets;
Gladness in every streamlet,
Rippling in joy to the river;
Spirit of flower-clad beauty,
Symbol of gladness, I greet you!

TAMALPAIS

With superhuman strength you shook
Your giant head, and raised it to the sky.
One mighty effort you put forth,
And lo! aloft you stand, your huge form lifted high.

Through walls of rock you came,—and broke
The mighty masses, tossing them far, free!
The fragments pierce your mammoth form
As mighty scars, now healed, revealing victory.

As on a face made beautiful
With marks of battles won, and conquered pride,
So all the beauty of the years
Is shown upon your slopes, emerging from your
side.

Uncompromising, proud you stand;
Majestic picture as you lordly tower;
Emblem of strength, great force reserved,
Unflinching monument of your eternal power!

FOG CURTAIN

San Francisco

Nature, beneficent, with artist's eye
And lavish hand, her draperies hung high;
They billow full on all her city gates,
Encircling her seven hills with soft
Diaphanous folds of silvered loveliness.
From hill to hill the curtain clings, and falls
In limpid lines and curves;—and swerves above
Her strongly-chiselled features lovingly.

Life's elements are guarded well beneath
The mantle, holding close the juice of life.
No blighting touch of frozen finger-tips
Dare venture under the protecting veil,
Nor over-heated breath of fevered sun
To draw the moisture from the pregnant air,—
Salt-laden strength that seeps into her soil.

Chosen days, rare days, in fleece-like waves,
The languid folds are swung aloft and blend
With warm sky-mist, that shafts of golden strength
May fall upon our city's naked breasts
And penetrate her form with nourishment,
The while she breathes the tempered atmosphere.

With twilight's soft approach her mantle, loosed,
Lightly falls across her curving form,
And, as a timid lover, wraps her close
In tender, soft embrace; to sleep again
Cloistered within her coverlet of silver.

UNDER THE TREES

Under the trees I'm reclining,
Under the sheltering trees—
Heaven is caught in the branches,
Patches of blue link the leaves,
Sheltering me with seclusion,
Shutting away space and time,
Bringing a sense of abandon,
Peace and a languor sublime.

Under the trees I am hearing
Thoughts not expressed in mere words,
Secrets revealed by the breezes,
Echoed in songs of the birds.
Murmurings out of the ether,
Voices from vastness afar,
Melodies fluttering earthward,
Songs that were born on a star!

Under the trees pungent perfumes
Permeate me, and renew
Memories dear of dim forests,
Cedar and cypress and yew;
Falling leaves scatter their fragrance,
Baptism holy and sweet,
Filling the air with an incense,
Scenting soft paths for my feet.

Under the trees all my senses,
 Stretched toward the canopy green,—
Touch the tall tips of the branches
 Hid in the shadowy screen.
Life is imbued with a fullness,
 Earth is a garden of ease
Under the trees in the open,
 Under broad sheltering trees.

SUMMER

Moments there are when joy has filled the heart
Too full for one more upward sigh;
When deepest yearnings of the soul surge strong
 within,
But silent die.

Before the cup is over-filled or runs
Beyond its bound,
A moment of quick ecstasy vibrates the calm,
Deep peace, profound.

Summer! Zenith of all beauty,—Art
Supreme, weaving with thy myriad tinted bloom
A fabric exquisite; the masterpiece
Of Nature's loom.

I STAND BESIDE A SPRING

It bubbles from the earth unceasingly;
Unceasingly it sends forth water clear
From source unending,—from a bountiful
And unturned faucet, flowing year by year.

What giant hand could lay this mighty main
That furnishes the life to beast and man?
What wisdom filter all the streams of earth,
Supply men's needs upon this lavish plan?

Spontaneously it sparkles from the earth,
As if it joyed to live, and squandered free
Its gift. Its subtle touch paints deep the rose.
Its pregnant power stirs every budding tree.

WRATH

The sea is breathing heavily tonight,
Like some huge beast unsatisfied, but leashed;
It heaves its savage breast,
And tugs to strain the chafing of its bounds.
The weathered clouds, taunting above its lunging head,
Beyond its power to strike,
But stirs its sullenness.

Now muttering low, it growls and snarls
And shows its fangs of tawny foam;
Still tossing, battling restlessly,
With wrath increasing, voice becoming loud,
It shouts its vengeance at the stolid cliff!

Incensed by the repulse,
As if the mad attack increased its fury,
It beats and lashes all its ominous depths
Into a mad upheaval of white rage, until—
Exhausted, spent, and broken in weak wrath,
It dribbles back and slinks away, ashamed.

*The sea is breathing restlessly tonight,
As if disturbed by its mad burst of futile passion.*

SPIRIT OF SAN FRANCISCO

Spirit intangible that creeps and slowly sinks
Its roots into the soul! Spirit unbound,
Unchartered,—ever roving where it wills—
Rising elusive from the pregnant ways,
Embracing, sense-absorbing, vine-like myth,
As strong and varied as her rough-hewn hills!

Encouraging the languorous to loll
At ease upon her sun-draped slopes, and dream—
While pillowed soft in fragrance—lazy dream
Of sunny slopes of Spain, to turn again
And see them mirrored in the silver bay.

The roving soul, sprawled restless on the sands,
Peering with seeing eyes beyond the gate,
Contented, shrugs more deep his shoulders wide,
And settles in the shifting sand-grains, as
From lowered lids he follows vagrant craft
Across the bar, and sees them slowly drop
Below the curve of the horizon's edge;
Knowing, however fair the old worlds seem,
The veering sails will one day turn again
To catch the western breeze; and drift once more
Within the shelter of the luring port.

Tang of the air, that presses open wide
The lifted nostril; thrusting in its curve
Revivifying odors of salt spray!
The breeze with incense of the Orient;
Faint pungency of eucalyptus sap,
And subtle sweetness of the lupines' juice!

The rigid son of Commerce, Protege
Of Art,—Bohemia's loved vagabond,—
And youthful minds that yet can thrill afresh
At intake of the breath of life breathed hard,—
All, all respond to subtle influence
That, wraith-like as her ever guarding fog,
Is only dimly seen, and dimly sensed;
But ever growing, creeps and winds itself
Close, with its tendrils firmly rooted, deep
Into the soil of every heart. Roots strong,
That penetrate the bed-rock of the ground.

LEAVES

Splashes of scarlet and orange!
Brown-tinged yellow and russet!

Leaves!

Gorgeous, glorious leaves,
Etchings and motifs of autumn;
After the season of blooming,
Burnished with glorified colors;
Riotous, orient splendor!

Leaves!

Languorously fluttering, poising,
Carpeting bare open spaces
Rich with your orient weavings.

Leaves!

Down to the earth you're descending,
Back to the mother who nourished—
Draping her dullness with beauty,
Showering glory upon her;
Even as they who are snatching
Splashes of color from living,
Brighten the source with new gladness;
Pierce the pale drab with a splendor!
Bringing the golden and scarlet
Into the browns and the shadows!

IN FANCY'S WONDERLAND

Long years ago, in childhood days,
My parents always thought my ways
Uncommon strange, eccentric, queer;
For things to them quite real were mere,
In my small brain, fantastic show;
Or stranger still, were all aglow
With glories, splendors dear to me
That none but Fancy's eye could see.
I could not understand
Why others could not with me share
Alluring visions pictured there.
 In our small home,
 I lived alone
 In Fancy's wonderland.

And when they did not comprehend
My little vagrant visions, then
A new idea seized my brain:
(It first brought joy, and later pain.)
That I was really not their child,
But long years past a brigand wild,
Through crafty, subtle act, unseen,
Had stolen me from magic queen,
In mystic foreign land.
And since no filial love they felt,
For many wistful days I dwelt
 On wrongs I knew,
 That later grew
 In Fancy's wonderland.

When after I was made to feel
My parents were my own, and real,
Keen sorrow with the thought was sown,
That I was only, as their own,
A simple child, of simple birth,
With lowly station on the earth,
Until at last a vision new
Evolved itself, and ever grew
Until the world it spanned!
No more in modest home we dwelt,
But in my childish mind I felt
 My home, once plain,
 New grandeur gain
 In Fancy's wonderland.

I'd climb the rustic loft of hay
And to my inner self I'd say:
"These ruins add much to the charm
Of these vast acres, wooded farm
Of my old squire." And gazing through
The farmyard gate, I only knew
It as the portal stately, tall,
That led into the entrance hall
Of castle large and grand.
And every little rustic walk
Or garden path, to me would talk
 Of wooers old,
 Knights brave and bold,
 In Fancy's wonderland.

In going to my simple bed
I'd turret mount, with tousled head
Held high; as childish thought would roam
Around this mansion, once the home
Of royal knight, now far away;
And we, his kinsmen, here to stay
Until the wandering one returned.
And as the candle lower burned,
With childish eye I scanned
The curtains, that to me were old
Soft Persian, threaded all with gold,
 And carven chair,
 And grandeur rare,
 In Fancy's wonderland.

At morn, as I on pony sat,
(In truth, 'twas rather slow and fat,)
I rode on steed with flowing mane,
And cantered through the country lane
As if but viewing the estate
Of my ancestors, proud and great.
Instead of open fields and road,
Upon my steed of black I rode
On tropic fairy strand,
With tall trees waving as I passed,
And blossoms that forever last,
 Full many miles
 By bridges, stiles,
 In Fancy's wonderland.

A little way below the hill
The ocean with unswerving will
Surged in upon the rock-bound coast;
Here proudly I would stand and boast
Of my domain, boundless and grand!
The water-ways were fairy-land
Where lived my people, and the tide
Swift carried them. I saw them ride
High up upon the sand.
Toward visions vague as mist, I'd strain
My eyes across the restless main,
And long I'd gaze
In mystic maze
In Fancy's wonderland.

* * * * *

O waves! Your rainbow-tinted spray
Painted my childish dreams for me;
Created fair my fairy-peopled strand,
As now your surging melody
Makes martial music on the way
Of my abiding, rarer wonderland!



HIGH NOON



TO MY FRIEND

If I had wings to carry me away,
I'd fly to you, O friend of my glad heart,
And sing a melody of thankfulness
For strength, of which you gave the greater part.
For when to me the narrow road seemed rough,
Too steep to climb to reach the longed-for goal,
You always guided, urged my tired feet,
And with your faith revived my weakened soul.

O tender heart, unselfish in your gift,
And generous in every helpful thought,
In a full tide my thanks flow back to you
Seeking the comfort that you always brought.
If I, in simple note, can tune again
One other silent voice to vibrant songs,
To you shall then return the praise and joy;
To you the cup of happiness belongs.

BUGLE NOTE

Before you came into my life, I had not known
In my un-seeing heart there could be sown
Such love that soon would color fair a whole
New world for me,—illumine my blinded soul.

Before you came into my life, and altered all,
No voice had thundered forth the clarion call
“Awake! thou idle dreamer! Onward go!
To lure of laggard’s voice, dare answer ‘No’.”

Before you came into my life, no loving guide
To upward path walked ever by my side;
Yet though with you my heart can really rest,
Always I hear the call, “On! Live thy best!”

POTENTIAL

Do you know how little violet accepts its draught of
dew,

And lifts its head once more to azure sky?

Do you know how golden gilly-flowers their yellow
cups uphold,

Receiving benediction from on high?

Thy friendship thus inspires my soul with gladness,

And stirs my heart in new desire to be

All that I craved, all that thou still believest,

And in thy blindness thou now thinkest me.

SUNRISE

The day dawned cold, deserted, damp and drear,
 Nothing above
Or on the earth or sea gave forth a sound,
 Save one lone dove.

Grey mist surrounded it; I saw it pictured there
 A bird forlorn.
As, sad, it rested on a storm-swept branch
 That cheerless morn.

That one grey lonely dove murmured its plea,
 A plaintive cry,
To find its mate. My sad heart echoed forth
 Its wail on high.

Then from the barren grey of life
 You came to me.
The sun broke through illusion's mist, and shone
 Gloriously.

You kissed my eyes, my lips.—Then tenderly
 You touched my hair,
Caressingly you stroked its midnight mesh,
 And lingered there.

Ah love, the warmth that flamed forth from your eyes
 Dispelled life's grey;
And there was born anew that hour for me
 A fairer day.

What matters if all life be one long night,
 Dark skies and drear?
For me has dawned that joyous golden day—
 My dawn is here!

TO W. E. M.

I wonder, dear, if you can guess
How much you give of happiness
In life's great hours or moments less,
Because—you understand.

I feel it matters not with you
If I seem thoughtless, or untrue;
You love, no matter what I do,
Because—you understand.

Some look for explanations; fear
The acts or deeds of which they hear,
And friendship bought thus proves too dear,
But you—you understand.

Such faith as yours proves all I need
To help me strive for nobler deed,
And strengthens me to live my creed;
Content—you'll understand.

SYMBOL FLOWER

You brought me a blossom, dear,
 You had plucked in a wayside yard;
A fragile, delicate thing,
 That whispered of your regard.

The day had been steeped in fog;
 No sunshine kissed the pane;
The blossom breathed of May,
 Touched life with hope again.

You brought me a symbol, dear,
 A delicate, fragile thing,
And the fragrance that stirred in the air
 Was you, and your love, and Spring.



ON UPWARD TRAILS



TWO ROADS

The path of Least Resistance is an easy path to tread,
For the road seems broad and winding, and we cannot see ahead.

It looks to be quite level, but it really leads you down
Into Sure Dissatisfaction and Irritation Town.

The path of Daily Effort is a rocky road and steep;
But on the rugged pathway you can always get a peep
Of Self-Respect and Progress. And as you higher
stray
You'll find the flower of Happiness growing by the
way.

Although the former pathway seems fairer to one's
view,
It does not lead to places where you keep your vision
true;
The harder road leads always on where life is rugged,
free.
Come, buckle on your mental spurs and mount the
heights with me.

KINSHIP

I do not feel myself descending low,
Or shrinking into pale significance
When I behold the wonders of the earth
Or recognize the strength of cosmic force;
But, as I ponder with a searching mind
Upon the process and the law of life,
I realize my kinship with the source,
And find exhilaration for my soul;
When I become a part of Infinite
Mysterious Nature, I cannot but know
That you, O Man, are also linked with life,
And therefore greet you as a soul sublime.

A PICTURE

I saw him on a busy street,
This night so balmy, mild,
A lad of eight or ten, perhaps—
A little hungry child.

But brave he called his evening news
In plaintive tones, yet loud;
His tiny form could scarce be seen
Among the bustling crowd.

His pleading voice made swift appeal
To my keen listening ear;
And eagerly I turned to him,
And quickly he drew near.

Oh, not in words he told his tale!
His face, pale, sadly thin,
Betrayed a vital, urgent need,
A hungry soul within.

Such hunger—not alone for food,
But hunger of the heart
For carefree hours of happy play
That should have been his part.

The tired lines and weary droop
Of head upon his breast
Appealed for hours that boyhood needs
Of rich, life-giving rest.

His very presence there alone,
With no fond mother near,
Was living plea for sheltering arms
That childhood holds most dear.

I then had left a gallery
Of modern painters' art,
But this, a living picture, burned
More deep into my heart.

THE CHINA LILY

*(China-lily bulbs will bloom longer and the fragrance
be sweeter if bulbs are kept in the dark a few days
after planting.)*

Sheltered in darkness, humble, unseen,
Till thy bulbs burst into tenderest green,
Blossoming patiently, greeting the sun
Only when all thy maturing is done,

Sweet China-lily that breathes on the air
Delicate perfume, fragrant and rare,
Strong are thy rootlets, sturdy thy stem,
Teaching a wonderful lesson to men.

* * * * *

If we but hastily seize on a theme,
Build a belief from a fabric of dream,
Thought lacking judgment and reason and power
Fades into nothingness—lives but an hour.

ON HEARING OF THE DEATH
OF CARUSO

There burst upon earth's waiting ear a song!
As if Life's orchestration held a tone
Of new-found harmony, a vibrant note
Of soothing sweetness, not of joy alone
But joy that mingled sorrow in its strain,
Awoke some long-lost chord, and tossed it free,
Vibrating the heart-strings of the world,
To blend them in one strong responsive key.

And shall we hear no more these stirring notes
Of beauty? Can such joyous sounds be stilled?
Nay! In the inner ear still dwells the real
Eternal music! All the air is filled
With poignant memories undying, all
The melting tones the singer joyed to give;
While in our consciousness we feel, we know,
That harmonies, once sung, forever live.

I WALK UNAFRAID

I leave behind uncertainty, mistrust,
I bury deep the faint and faltering word;
For I have seen the work that I must do,
The voice of lofty purpose I have heard.

No more shall any hand turn me aside,
No more shall pleading voices bid me stay.
My feet are firmly set on my own path,
And cannot from my course be led astray.

Not I alone, but all men walk with me;
All men who keenly feel or see or hear
The mystery of life, all tread the road
That leads to height beyond all mortal fear.

BLINDED

"In stricken Poland," so the item states,
 "Innumerable babies are born blind,
And scientists say in the mothers' womb
 A lack of vital nourishment they find."

A simple little story, simply told
 Within the pages of the daily press;
Not a bare headline to attract the eye
 Or vague suggestion of dire thoughtlessness.

Are we, through plenty, even surplus now,
 Become immune to thoughts of others' need?
Do we bow down before an earthly shrine
 And place our gold above all other creed?

It may be that we, too, are maimed for life
 With loathsome blight that menaces the whole
Fair race with more far-reaching direful scourge,
 With deadly blindness of the human soul.

Dare Congress pause to think on "Foreign Trade,"
 Or "Better Business," while far nations weep?
When little children, innocent of crime,
 In blindness cry, and in their blindness creep?

PRAYER

Give me Thy quietness, Heart of the World;
I would be still, and long commune with Thee.
My soul is weary yearning for Thy peace;
Let me repose in Thy tranquility.
Oft for a moment I could hear Thy voice
Amid earth's myriad noises sounding near;
Too faintly came Thy message, my true sense
Of consciousness is dulled. Thy voice, still dear,
I long to know. Give me but power to feel
The Spirit of that brooding heart of Thine.
Tune my ear true that in each human voice
I recognize the tone of the Divine.







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